DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 390 489 JC 960 072

TITLE	The Illinois Community College System and the School-to-Work Transition Initiative: A Working Model.
INSTITUTION	Illinois Community Coll. Board, Springfield.
PUB DATE	Jan 95
NOTE	28p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*College Role; *Community Colleges; *Education Work Relationship; Institutional Mission; Job Training; *Labor Force Development; *Partnerships in Education; School Business Relationship; *School Community Relationship; Technical Education; Transitional Programs; Two Year Colleges; Vocational Education
IDENTIFIERS	*Illinois Community College System

ABSTRACT

Community colleges represent the ideal location for building the high skilled workforce needed in a "high tech" society since they are community-based and responsive to local needs. In ensuring a well-prepared workforce, it is important that the link between elementary and secondary systems and community colleges be strengthened and expanded. Through the Illinois Community College System's (ICCS's) school-to-work initiative, colleges and secondary systems are working in partnership to provide successful transitions for students through technical, honors, and telecommunication programs. Currently, the ICCS serves nearly one million students annually, representing a wide variety of student goals. To respond to these goals, the ICCS offers associate degree transfer programs, occupational degree and certificate programs, apprenticeship and work-based learning programs, bridge programs to prepare high school students with varying skill levels for college-level programs, youth-centered programs, and adult education. As part of its commitment to provide community services, the ICCS has developed a statewide telecommunications network designed to enhance educational opportunities for the community. It also provides business and industry training and retraining, career centers, small business development centers, technology centers, and manufacturing outreach centers. Finally, the school-to-work initiative places a tremendous emphasis on partnerships with business and industry, providing technical assistance for work-based learning components and updating information on employment and new technology. (Flow charts of the ICCS school-to-work initiative are appended.) (TGI)

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ED 390 489

THE ILLINOIS COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM AND THE SCHOOL-TO-WORK TRANSITION INITIATIVE

A Working Model

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THE ILLINOIS COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM

AND

THE SCHOOL-TO-WORK TRANSITION INITIATIVE

Introduction

To say we live in an era of rapid and pervasive change is probably the understatement of the year. But to understand the world around us and plan to deal with the effects of this change on our lives, we need to think daily about the changes around us and be creative and constructive in organizing social structures which fit the new age and the new demands.

We all note the changes in technology, the new computers, the new ways to transmit and receive information, but we often fail to realize that each of these changes is part of the massive change known as the transition from the Industrial Age to the Information Age. The transition probably began somewhere back in the 1950s, and futurists tell us we are now well into this new age. The social and political unrest, they tell us, is probably due to the massive misfit of the outdated social infrastructure we have found so difficult to change. This infrastructure was designed to address the problems of another age and must be revamped for effective solutions today.

As we were told in Marshall McLuhan's often quoted book about the effects of television on our nation, *The Medium Is The Message*, it is not the direct impact of an invention, but the many indirect effects it has on our lives that make changes cumulative and begin to demand massive change in our societal infrastructure.

We have been putting "bandaids" on our education and training infrastructure for many years now. We have organized a series of job training programs for over 30 years. We have over 50 government programs to train and retrain a workforce which does not seem to have adequate work skills when it leaves high school and appears to need constant retraining to meet

the changing work needs. Since the early 1980s, criticism of the American education system has grown and is expressed daily in one way or another.

It is now time to take the best practices of the last few years and pull them together into a stable and dependable infrastructure which can be supported by, depended upon, and responsive to the constantly changing needs of each local community. The community college system is such a structure and already has a superb record of being the primary provider of workforce education, skill training, and retraining for the nation.

This paper is about changes needed in the community college segment of the higher education arena. It builds on the perceptive and innovative concepts for the organization of the elementary and secondary education in Illinois offered by Dr. Joseph A. Spagnolo, State Superintendent of Education in the concept paper, *The Illinois Quality Schools Initiative: "Building the Foundation For Change"*.

In dealing with the community college mission, however, this paper covers not only the options available for young secondary completers, but choices for individuals who have left school before they have achieved a diploma, for those who are on welfare and other support programs, and for workers who need additional or upgrading of work skills whether they are pre-college or graduate level.

All of the programs mentioned in this paper already are in practice in one community college or another in Illinois. This concept paper has picked the best practices of these colleges and suggests it is now time to make many of them common to all community colleges as options for building an adequate infrastructure which meets the needs of this "high tech" society. If America is going to have the high wage workforce we all want, our workforce must have the high skills to command those wages. The community college is the logical place to build and maintain that high skilled workforce. In the words of President Clinton during his visit to Carl

Sandburg College, "I believe as strongly as I can state that community colleges represent the very best of America in 1995, and where we need to go as a country with all of our institutions -- community-based, flexible, committed to quality, opportunity for everyone, with a real sense of community." The community college role then is to provide students with training and retraining programs which help Americans achieve social mobility, while helping our nation maintain its prominence in a fast-changing world.

Relationships With High Schools

Building on Dr. Spagnolo's plan, it is important that the link between the elementary and secondary systems and the community college system be strengthened and expanded. Working closely together complements our systems and ensures success for our students. In order for our citizens to obtain good jobs with decent wages, it is necessary to have more than a high school diploma, but often less than a baccalaureate degree. The fastest growing segment of our workforce is the new technical area, which demands both specific technical skills and advanced reading, writing, speaking, and analytical skills. So rather than viewing the attainment of a high school diploma as a completion of our formal education, we should view it as the first step to the significant attainment of workforce skills. Two systems, secondary and community college systems, working in partnership, can create better-prepared students who will be ready to move into the high-skill, high-wage jobs of the future. With programs already in place, such as tech prep, honors programs, telecommunications, and the Lincoln's Challenge Scholarship Program, the community college and the secondary systems are working together and committed to sharing resources and providing successful transitions from one educational experience to another and to the successful transition to high-skill, high-wage careers. Also, both tech prep and

telecommunications programs are important transition links to the implementation of the School-to-Work Initiative.

As partners they can help guide young people through the secondary and community college systems and then will lead them most effectively into high-skill, high-wage careers.

A Vision for Community Colleges

Community colleges represent the largest delivery system of postsecondary education in the United States. In Illinois, the community college system represents 65 percent of all students in public higher education and serves nearly one million Illinois citizens annually. Community colleges offer life-long learning opportunities to a diverse student population who have a variety of personal and professional goals. Community colleges are indeed flexible, accessible, and adaptable to changing needs and are entrepreneurial institutions. They are continuously creating new programs and resources to meet the changing demands of students, as well as business and industry. The perception of community colleges as "junior" colleges is simply no longer valid. Community colleges undertake what is arguably higher education's most complex role, and they do so in a productive and accountable fashion.

Associate degree transfer programs, occupational degrees and certificates, vocational training and retraining courses, adult education, programs responsive to community needs, and customized training programs for business and industry are all part of the colleges' mission to serve their communities.

Associate Degree Transfer Programs

Associate degree transfer programs prepare students for transfer to baccalaureate degree-granting institutions. The associate in science and the associate in arts degrees earned by students at community colleges transfer without loss of credit to colleges and universities through

articulation agreements developed between community colleges and other higher educational institutions. These agreements are constantly evolving and improving through the efforts of the Illinois Articulation Initiative that involves panels of community college faculty meeting with university faculty to resolve curriculum issues in each discipline area.

Occupational Degree and Certificate Programs

Occupational degrees and certificate programs are designed to prepare students to directly enter careers in high labor market occupations. These programs are the backbone of the community in which each college is located and directly reflect workforce need. Workforce preparation programs vary greatly among the college districts because they are based on local labor market information. These types of programs always have been a major focus of community colleges offering workforce preparation in more than 240 occupational specialties, including the nation's top occupational demand programs, such as computer information systems and health care occupations. In a recent survey of occupational program graduates, 92 percent were either employed in their field of training or were continuing their education.

In combination with these two important program areas are **educational guarantees**. These guarantees provide that graduates of "guaranteed" programs will obtain and will perform the technical skills required by their occupation, or they may enroll at no cost, in courses necessary to gain these skills. These guarantees also are applied to transfer programs, ensuring that course credits will transfer or students' tuition will be refunded.

Apprenticeship/Work-Based Learning

The central theme of School-to-Work is the integration of work experiences and classroom experiences into an integrated and holistic learning program where the workplace becomes a learning environment, strengthening the learning in the classroom.

Community colleges provide work experiences that are coordinated with college-based instruction, training in workplace competencies, and instruction related to specific industry skills. Examples include on-the-job training, job shadowing, and college-sponsored enterprises, such as apprenticeships, that are in collaboration with trade and labor organizations and provide direct training for trades such as construction, welding, and machine tooling to name only a few.

Bridge Programs

A community college bridge program can prepare high school students, entering college at different skill levels, for a variety of community college programs. This specialized preparation can provide a level of maturity to succeed in college and beyond. Typically, these programs are considered to be remedial or developmental preparation.

Youth Programs

Community colleges offer a variety of youth-centered programs and include the following:

- "After-school" programs are small, exploratory classes and activities for elementary and secondary students in a variety of areas;
- "Children Learning with Parents" are programs designed to help children and parents spend quality time together while learning new skills;
- Enrichment programs for youth provide students, ages three through 16, to explore areas and interests beyond regular school programs;
- Art and sports programs are offered for children of ages three and up, and usually on Saturdays;
- Summer camps and summer activities are available every summer and provide intensive camps and activities in sports, art, theater, music, and computers as well as a variety of enrichment classes for ages three and up.

- Alternative high schools that enable high school dropouts to complete the high school diploma.

Adult Education

In an effort to address illiteracy, every community college in Illinois operates an adult education program. The Illinois community college system has become the primary provider of adult education throughout the state. Adult education programs at community colleges are designed to create a bridge to life-long, seamless education. These programs meet individual and community educational needs by recognizing the diverse backgrounds and living environments of adult education students while, collaborating closely with community agencies, government, business and industry, and other education institutions.

Community Services

Telecommunications

The Illinois Community College Board has taken a leadership role in developing and implementing a statewide telecommunications network designed to enhance educational opportunities for Illinois citizens. The network, built around several regional consortia will serve colleges and universities, elementary and secondary schools, local business and industry, and local government entities. Through advanced communication technologies, we are provided the opportunity to come closer together, while still being miles apart, to learn, work, and solve problems. The telecommunications network is designed to promote and enhance educational access and opportunity for Illinois citizens while allowing more effective and efficient use of resources. Community colleges are also establishing themselves as their communities' link to the Information Superhighway (Internet). Voice, video, and data networks provide incredible educational access that makes it possible for school and work to literally join together.

Business and Industry Training and Retraining

Training and retraining for careers or for specific business and industry need is a role the community colleges take very seriously. It is in this arena that community colleges become vehicles for life-long learning. Generally termed as community or continuing education, these programs represent flexible, alternative approaches to teaching and learning and can respond to the diverse and multicultural needs of adults and to the communities in which they live. These programs provide the blueprint for moving this state into the 21st century, while ensuring that we are competitive in the global economy.

Career Centers

Community career centers are the basis of a viable learning system and the link for a smooth transition from school to work. Students must develop the skills to help them plan and prepare for their future. At community colleges, these centers provide counseling and guidance for career awareness, exploration, and placement; encouragement, esteem-building, and retention; testing and assessment; up-to-date labor market information; and life-skills preparation. The career centers also offer workshops and seminars on jobs, job skills, new technologies, and new teaching/learning methods.

Small Business Development Centers/Technology Centers/Manufacturing Outreach Centers

The community colleges are linked closely with business and industry through a variety of centers, such as Small Business Development Centers, technology centers, and manufacturing outreach centers, and provide services such as customized training, modernization, marketing, and information on a variety of resources. Through various Job Training Partnership Act programs, the colleges also provide centers and programs for dislocated workers, displaced homemakers, and training and support for women in nontraditional careers.

It is important to note that while the community colleges have been operating business and technology centers for quite some time, these are still considered to be in their infancy. The capabilities of these centers are enormous relative to the roles and services that can be provided as technology and occupations continue to change.

Community Partnerships/Councils

There is a tremendous emphasis on partnerships with business/industry under the School-to-Work Initiative. Community colleges have established good relationships with business and industry in their districts. They are involved with planning councils and other coordinating boards and initiatives that strive to keep different systems and partners working together, while reducing duplication of services and resources. Under School-to-Work, such coordinating councils take on a very important advisory role in order to maintain linkages and transition to the world of work. These councils can help recruit businesses to offer jobs in market-driven occupations and can provide technical assistance to educational institutions and businesses for work-based learning components. Also, these business partners who make up a council have their finger on the pulse of employment need, new technology, and competition. Their role then, becomes a very important one in assuring communities that community colleges are offering relevant and up-to-date instruction.

The community college's boundaries provide a geographic location that has been a common denominator to bring numerous communities and school systems together to foster educational, service, and cultural activities.

Conclusion

School-to-Work cannot be viewed as another program, but rather as a conceptual framework that integrates instruction and careers. That framework has to provide multiple avenues for people to transition into and within the world of work. The current community college system provides such a working model for a framework through its array of programmatic options and partnerships with secondary education, four-year colleges and universities, and strong business and industry ties. By enhancing this model through at least some of the suggestions that follow, School-to-Work will revolutionize the way education and work in Illinois.

It is estimated that over half of all entering college freshman test below college level in reading, writing, and computational skills. With the innovation and reform prescribed by the School-to-Work Opportunities Act, we can begin to create and build upon a comprehensive education and training system that prepares all students for high-wage, high-skill jobs or further education -- or, in other words, college **and** careers.

Community colleges and the secondary system will continue to work closely together. Beginning early in the secondary experience, tenth grade or before, community college and secondary professionals can begin to focus students on career choices by emphasizing counseling, career awareness and exploration, and work-based learning experiences. Our two systems and our programs will become blended.

Every student can have the same educational opportunities. Students should not be tracked according to academic abilities, but rather their interests and abilities should be emphasized and cultivated. Students can choose multiple pathways and move in and out of these pathways with ease, always progressing to a successful outcome. It is understood that all students do not learn in the same way or at the same level. Innovative approaches to teaching

and learning must be stressed and implemented, and alternative paths to education and careers can be explored. The Youth Learning Center is one such approach. As identified in Spagnolo's paper, these centers would provide structured, work-based learning in which secondary schools and community colleges, along with employers, work together to ensure that at-risk individuals attain skills in order to transition to jobs. The Lincoln's Challenge Program and the Lincoln's Challenge Scholarship Program are innovative alternatives for students. Both programs should be expanded to enable access for larger numbers of students.

Retention efforts throughout all community college programs, but particularly for specialized innovative programs serving at-risk students, should be intensified.

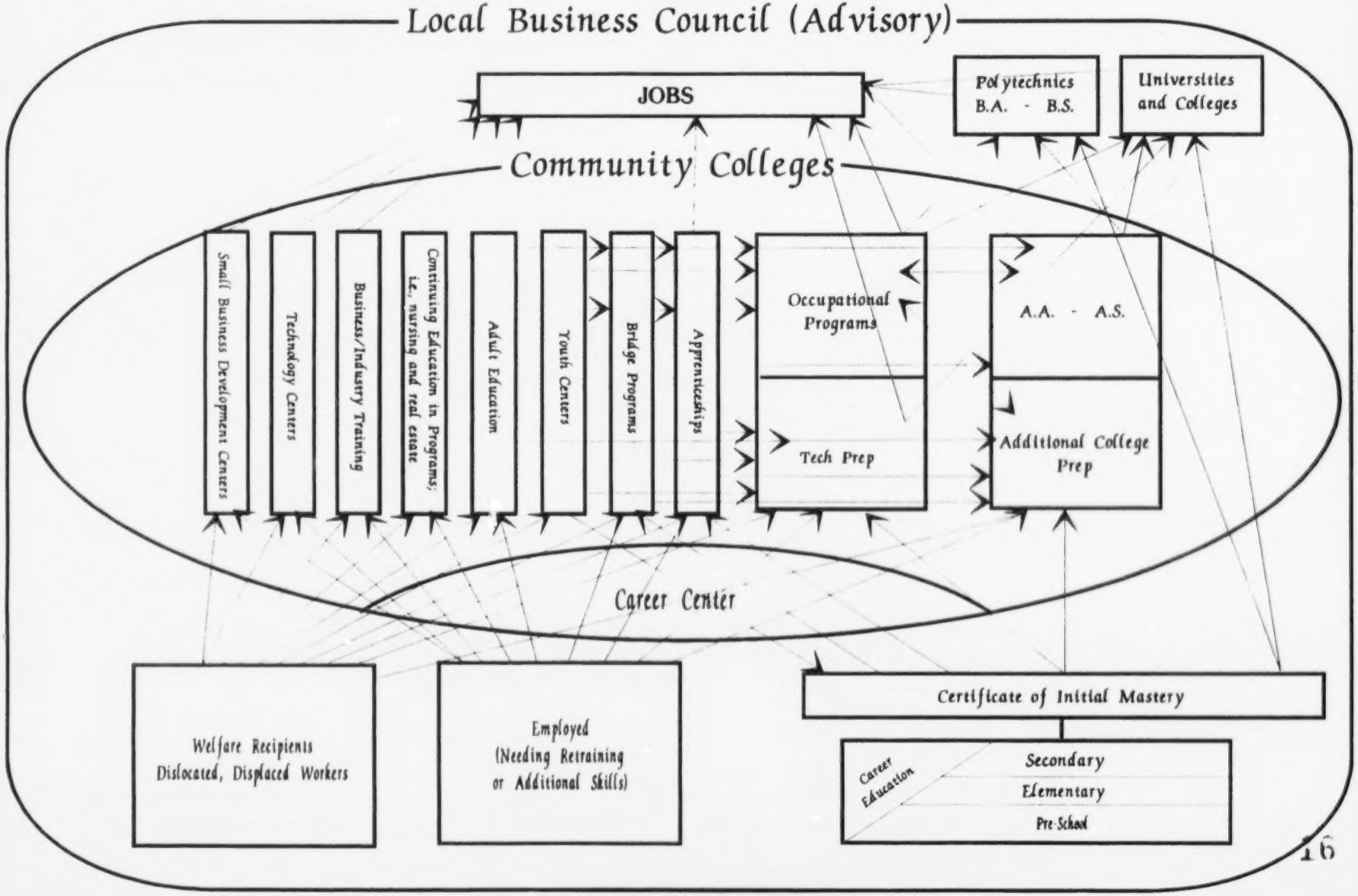
The secondary school/community college link also can provide two pathways for students -- the traditional pathway of completing a high school diploma or certificate of initial mastery, then continue into higher education, or a pathway that allows a student to pursue and complete a high school diploma/certificate of mastery and an associate in science, associate in arts, or an associate in applied science degree at the same time. Many states already have such programs in place.

Tech prep programs, or 2+2+2 programs, should be viewed as a major component of School-to-Work implementation that represents a model for learning-based/work based programs as well as represent a partnership among high schools, community colleges, and universities. The culture of community colleges emphasizing service, responsiveness, and collaborations with other institutions, as well as the community, strengthen the school-to-work transition. Recruiting more students earlier at the secondary level into these high-skill tech prep programs that utilize work and experiential learning strategies should increase since there is the promise of an articulated, seamless transitioning from one educational experience to another.

Community colleges have a proven track record in serving a tremendous number of disadvantaged students. These include more than 130,000 students enrolled in adult education and literacy programs; nearly 10,000 persons with disabilities; and more than 38,000 limited-English proficiency students. The colleges also are focusing on education as the primary means to move individuals off welfare roles. The Illinois Community College Board, in partnership with the Illinois Department of Public Aid, operate the Opportunities Program designed for welfare recipients. Both the Opportunities Program and employment training programs and services can easily be expanded at the community colleges. The resources needed by these hard-to-serve populations are available and accessible in an existing "one-stop shop."

Although it has been every parent's dream to have their son or daughter obtain a Bachelor's Degree, the statistics indicate that for all students continuing their education immediately after high school seeking a baccalaureate degree, 70 percent of those students do not complete that degree. Also, job opportunities tell us our economy is not demanding these degrees. Our growth in job opportunities is in the areas which require one or two years of college. Our communities need these skilled employees to build and rebuild a strong America, and community colleges are ready to provide the infrastructure to meet the needs of this "high-tech" society.

ILLINOIS COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM
SCHOOL-TO-WORK INITIATIVE



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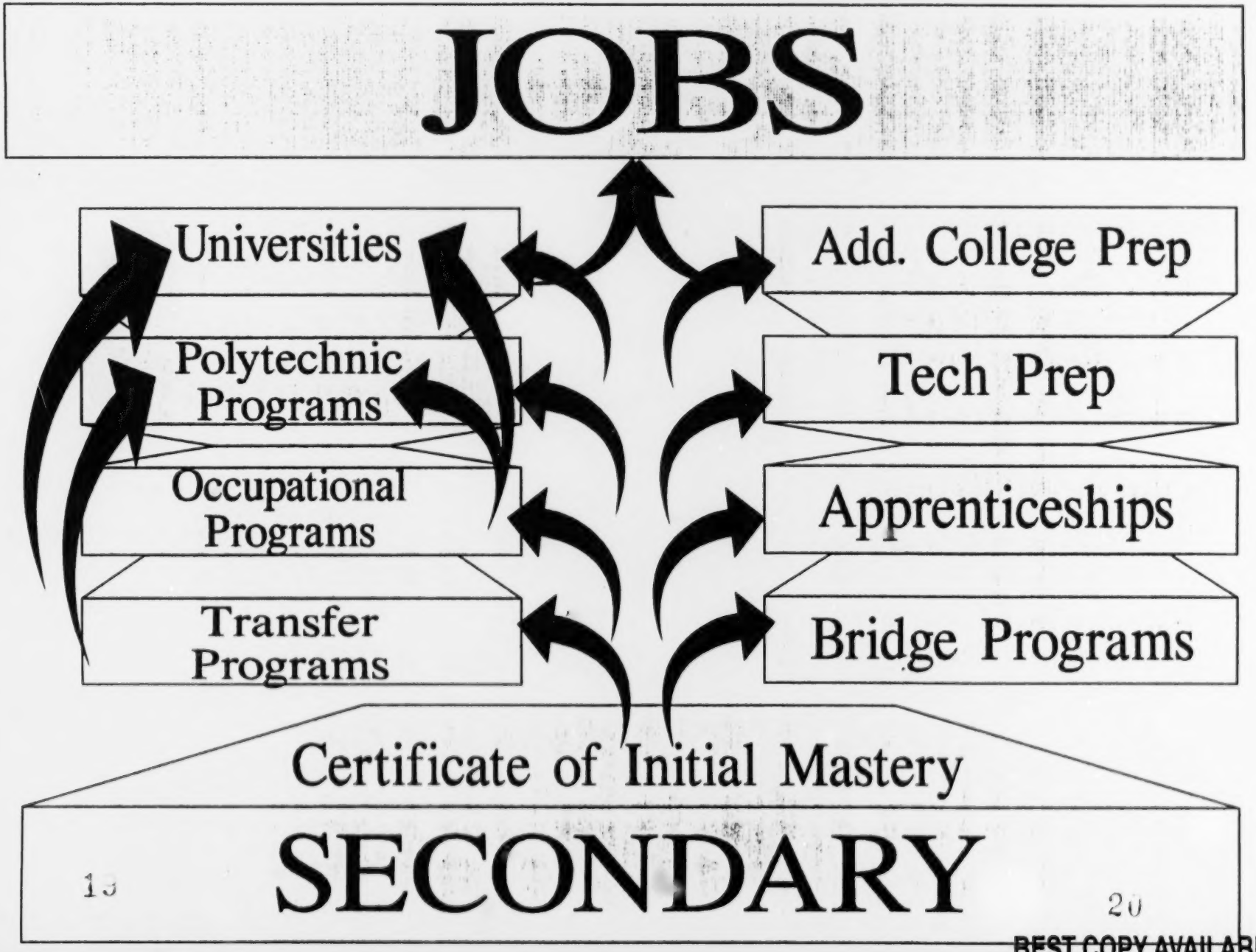
The Illinois Community College System
and
THE SCHOOL-TO-WORK TRANSITION INITIATIVE

A WORKING MODEL



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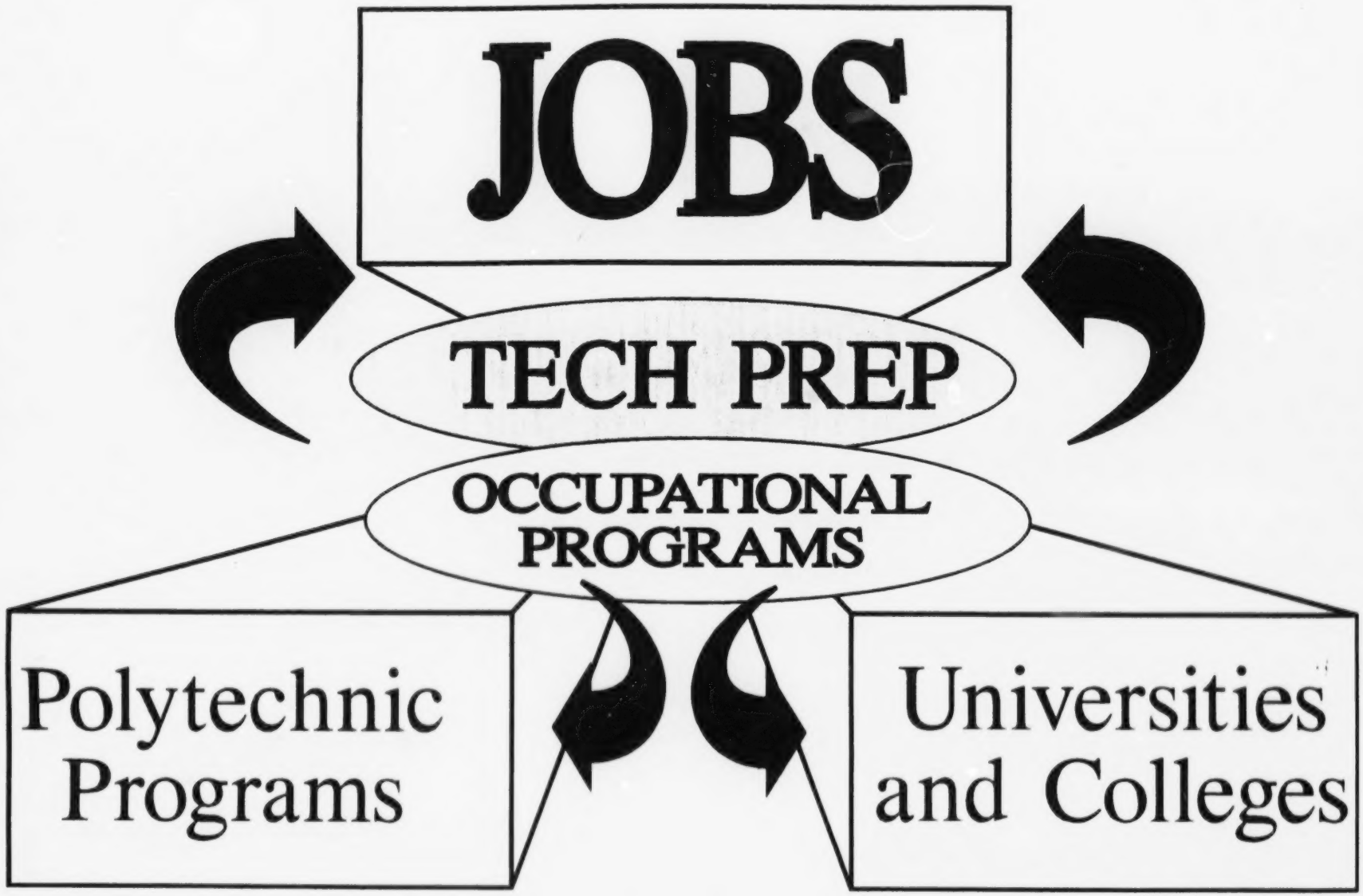
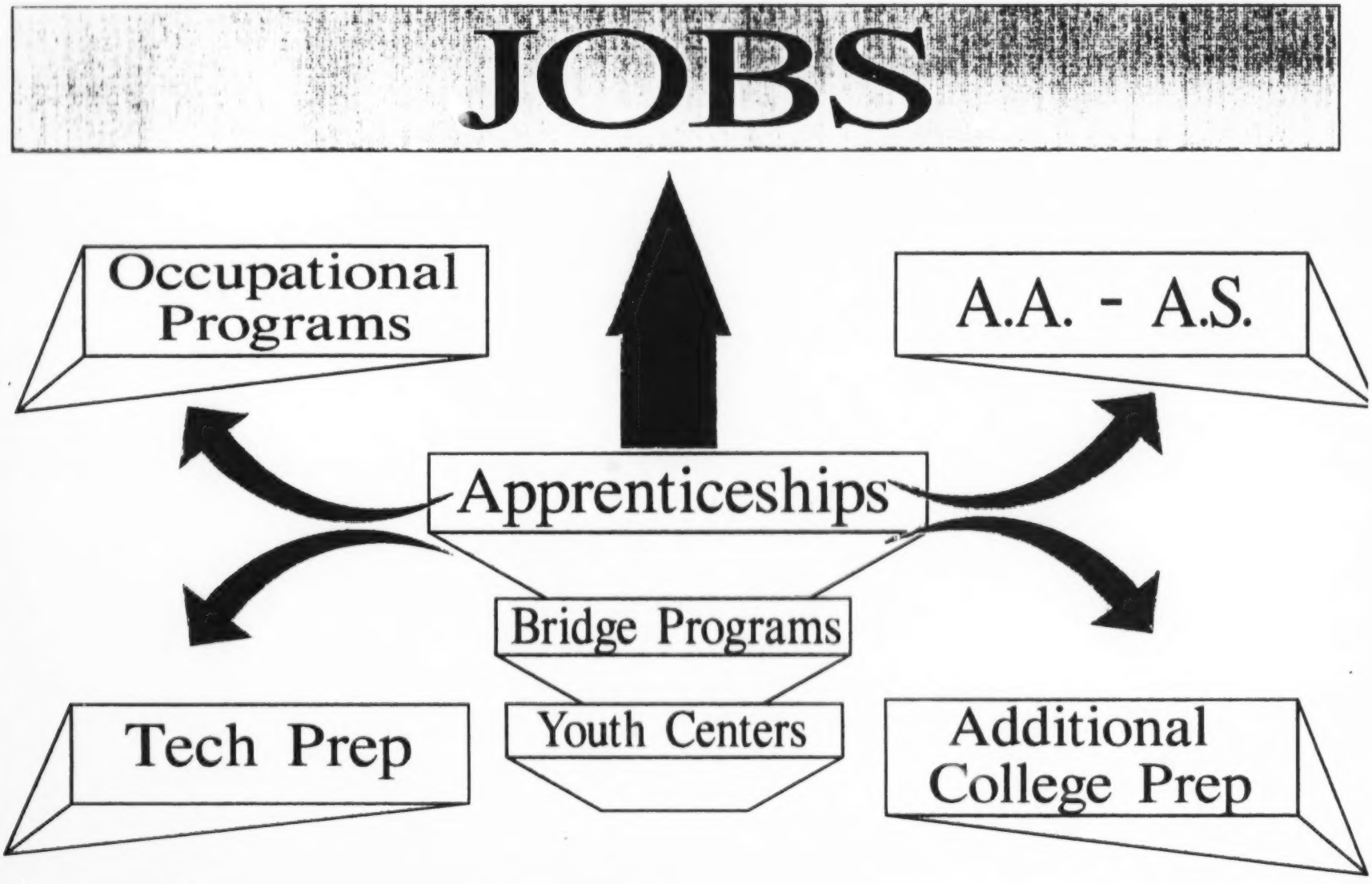

JOBS
TECH PREP
OCCUPATIONAL PROGRAMS
Polytechnic Programs
Universities and Colleges



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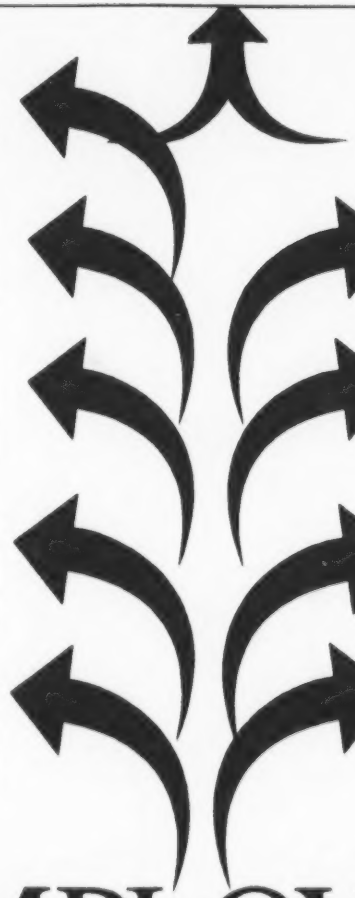
JOBS



Small Busn Dev Cent

Tech Centers

Busn/Ind Training

Cont. Education

Adult Ed

Add. College Prep

Tech Prep

Apprenticeships

Bridge Programs

EMPLOYED

(Needing Retraining & Skills)

JOBS

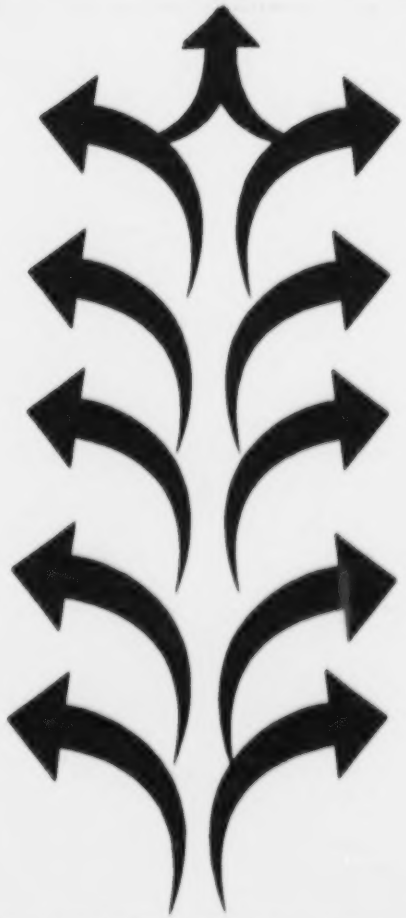
Small Busn Dev Cent

Tech Centers

Busn/Ind Training

Cont. Education

Adult Ed



Add. College Prep

Tech Prep

Apprenticeships

Bridge Programs

Youth Centers

WELFARE RECIPIENTS

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